

The Church celebrates this sixth Sunday of Lent as both Palm Sunday and Passion Sunday. This is the time of year we stop to remember and relive the events which brought about our redemption.

Attentive participation in the Holy Week liturgy will deepen our relationship with God, increase our faith and strengthen our lives as disciples of Jesus. Today's liturgy combines contrasting moments, one of glory, the other of suffering: the royal welcome of Jesus in Jerusalem and the drama of His trial, culminating in His crucifixion, death and burial. The Holy Week liturgies present us with the actual events of the dying and rising of Jesus. Just as Jesus did, we, too, must lay down our lives freely by actively participating in the Holy Week liturgies.

But let us remember that Holy Week can become "holy" for us only if we actively and consciously take part in the liturgies of this week. These events need to be cultivated in our minds from the Garden of Gethsemane to the trial before Pilate on Friday. Some of these are easier to cultivate than others, for one can easily recollect the Way of the Cross and the hill of Calvary.

In each and every event the scene is filled with real persons, who are either saints or sinners. Choices were made then that have determined their eternal destiny. Likewise we make daily choices that effect our ultimate destiny. The characters in the actual drama of redemption either appeal to us or disgust us, we are drawn to them or withdraw from them. Each of us can relate to some of them in a personal manner and we should be able to learn from them the essential message of this weekend that we are called to be faithful and not fickle in our discipleship.

All disciples are called to follow Jesus: 'Pick up your cross and follow me!' We follow him along the 'way'. There are four processional ways during Holy Week:

1. Palm Sunday: procession of expectation = Petition
2. Maundy Thursday: Eucharistic procession of worship = Adoration
3. Good Friday Cross: procession of sorrow = Repentance
4. Easter Vigil: procession of thanksgiving = Gratitude

In each procession we encounter diverse characters. I often wonder what was the mindset of Judas during the palm procession into Jerusalem. Surely the jubilant atmosphere must have inspired his deep longings for political ambition. What role or function did he covet in the supposed regime of the Master? Did he witness the tears of sorrow shed by our Saviour? For Christ, in a twinkling of an eye, saw the horrific destruction of the holy city by the Romans in the year 70. The Roman army after a long and bitter siege put to death hundreds of thousands and the holy temple was utterly destroyed, never to be rebuilt. If only the Jews had accepted Christ as their messiah all would have been averted, if only they had 'recognized the day of the Lord!'

Again let us consider the Lord's Supper in the Cenacle or Upper Room. The dinner was the occasion of three events: the institution of the Mass; the bestowal of the Priesthood; the call to service. It is this last one that often evokes much attention when Christ washed the apostles' feet as a gesture of service and humility for those called to govern. But I often dwell on the contrast between Peter and Judas, one outrageous in his claims the other hidden; one public the other private; one secretive the other ostentatious. Sometimes people hold that Judas was fated to betray Christ. He had too, so as to fulfil scripture. Yet on that night three times Christ sought through words and gestures to win Judas back from the abyss of sin. Three attempts of mercy to offset the forthcoming misery. Yet Judas was set in his convictions and traitorous path. If he had repented then, PLAN B would have eventuated and someone else would have become the betrayer so as to fulfil scripture. No he wilfully chose to do what he did. What we do not know is the why – his motive, and that has been the source of much speculation.

Casting aside motives and emotions, do we know all the characters in the drama of our redemption? Who was Malchus, Caiaphas, Nicomedus, Dismas, Barabbas, Veronica, Simon and so on. The more we enter into the ceremonies and reality of what happened then the more able we are to follow faithfully Christ now.

Let us therefore be faithful to our prayers this week and remain close to the Mother of Sorrows, our Mother, as we make our 'way' to Calvary.